

Testimony of Gabriel Fonseca, Program Manager
Madonna Place
240 Main Street
Norwich, CT 06360

3

Prepared for the Select Committee on Children
Public Hearing – Thursday, February 26, 2009
Committee Bill No. 5144 and Raised Bill No. 6486

My name is Gabriel Fonseca, Program Manager of the **Promoting Responsible Fatherhood Program** and three **Children's Trust Fund** programs at Madonna Place, a non-profit family support agency in Norwich. I am here today in support of **Committee Bill No. 5144 An Act Concerning an Appropriation to Expand the Nurturing Families Network** and **Raised Bill No. 6486 An Act Concerning Responsible Fatherhood and Strong Families**.

I support Committee Bill 5144 because the Children's Trust Fund (CTF) has proven to help our state cope with a costly social phenomenon, child abuse and neglect. The Children's Trust Fund has been a major supporter of our work with Norwich families for over 10 years. We have benefited from their leadership and guidance. I am currently managing a Nurturing Families Network program, a Family Empowerment Program working with fathers and families, and a Family School Connection program. All of these help parents and children with a focus on improving the chances that children will have a promising future. The Children's Trust fund uses research findings to guide program development. I respectfully ask this committee to consider the return on investment that is possible from expanding the work of the Children's Trust Fund. This entity has proven to be effective and should be considered an asset to the state that is worth the investment.

Regarding Raised Bill 6486, I respectfully ask you to support the concept of constructing a Problem-Solving Court Demonstration pilot program. If this program is implemented correctly, I am confident that it will help CT collect more from parents with child support arrears owed to the state. We are at a critical point in Connecticut and these times call upon us to use alternative responses.

I am sure you are aware of the large number of parents who owe child support to the state. Most of those parents are non custodial, low-income fathers who lack the skills needed to earn a living wage, lack confidence, or have criminal records that may be barriers to earning taxable wages. As a fatherhood practitioner, I have seen a number of dads come to the Madonna Place for support as they face their obligations. From my experience, the majority of those men were willing to handle their responsibilities yet many of them needed formal guidance to deal with the underlying problems that brought them to court. In the last two years, our fatherhood staff worked with over 250 dads. Of those, 67 asked us to support and guide them as they attempted to improve and maintain compliance with Child Support Enforcement. We helped 87% (58 fathers) of them comply with their child